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SAFETY DIVISION

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COMMISSIONER THOMAS H. MOORE
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Presentation before the

National Association of Hispanic Firefighters

Chicago, Illinois

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U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20207

OUTLINE OF SPEECH TO NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HISPANIC FIREFIGHTERS

I. INTRO

delighted to be here today to speak to men and women who stand on the front line in battling our nation's fires, and I know, have special interests in reducing the number of fires, especially in high fire-rate areas.

II. CPSC's role in fire safety

you may be wondering what CPSC's role is in fire safety

A. in nearly every residential fire, both the ignition source (e.g., matches, lighters, pilot

lights on appliances, portable heaters) and the first object ignited (e.g., mattresses, upholstered furniture, rugs) are products regulated by CPSC

B. CPSC has jurisdiction over 15,000 categories of products used in and around the house or in public places where consumers come into contact with them

C. agency has broad powers to ensure products do not present an unreasonable risk of death or injury to consumers. CPSC can:

1. mandate minimum safety requirements for products sold in this country (example: child-resistant cigarette lighters);

2. require companies to remove hazardous products from the marketplace (fire-related examples: cellular phone batteries, portable flood lamps, room air conditioners), and redesign products (example of design change: recently

announced retrofit for halogen torchiere-style lamps to require a guard over the bulb);

3. impose significant fines on companies or individuals who fail to comply with our regulations;

4. ask the Justice Dept. to bring criminal actions against those who knowingly and wilfully violate product safety regulations;

5. sanctions reach manufacturers, importers, distributors as well as sellers of violative products.

D. some fire-related projects currently underway at CPSC:

1. rulemaking to consider safety standard to reduce risk of small open-flame ignition of upholstered furniture (approx. 3800 fires a year);

2. study of the causes of range/oven

fires and examination of whether significant reductions possible with advanced fire detection technology (almost 25% of all residential fires involve ranges or ovens);

3. cooperative effort with industry to redesign gas water heaters so they will not ignite flammable vapors, such as from gasoline (1000 residential fires in 1994);

4. rulemaking on multi-purpose lighters (commonly used to light bbq grills) to consider making them child resistant (growing number of fires are started by young children playing with these devices);

5. examination of thermoplastic material used in small appliances which can ignite if there is an electrical malfunction in the appliance.

E. CPSC also undertakes educational

campaigns: example--home electrical wiring project--

1. on average, 43,000 fires every year from electrical distribution SYSTEMS in homes, claiming 350 lives, injuring four times that many;

2. CPSC rehabilitated four older homes around the country: Capitol Heights, Md., Redlands, Cal., Atlanta, Georgia, and St. Louis, Mo. to show economical repairs for serious electrical problems;

3. two technical videos were produced showing how corrections could be done at much lower costs:

- a. following the suggestions in the video, it would cost approximately \$1,000 to \$2,000 to solve the typical set of immediate electrical wiring problems encountered in an older home;

- b. compare this with a cost of \$5,000 to \$10,000 to bring a modest size home up to full compliance with the National Electrical Code;

4. videos very popular with public;
many more requests than we expected.

F. CPSC also encourages widespread use of
early warning devices (smoke detectors, CO
detectors).

III. Ways CPSC tries to reach Hispanic
communities

A. produce publications in Spanish: newest
one is our *Fire Safety Checklist for Older Consumers*,
published in conjunction with AARP and the State
Fire Marshals; I have copies of the English and
Spanish versions with me for anyone interested;
write/phone CPSC for more; also have list of all
publications that have been translated into Spanish;

B. Our telephone Hotline has Spanish-
speaking staff members; this is our primary link to
consumers, who can call 24 hours a day to report
products they believe are hazardous, or request

information; (our Hotline number is 800-638-CPSC (2772));

C. Our computer link Web site (address: www.cpsc.gov) has a section with information in Spanish:

1. shows publications available in Spanish;
2. lists various safety alerts that are in Spanish;

D. earlier in the year the commission had forum for Hispanic groups to give us input on CPSC activities--received many good suggestions to improve our services; hope we keep that dialogue going

E. where data shows that some hazards may affect specific ethnic groups more than other segments of the population: we try to fashion solutions that will take into account the most

effective means for reaching those communities.

example: last year, for example, we produced radio spots specifically designed and distributed to reach Black American audiences;

example: higher rate of CO poisoning from burning charcoal indoors for cooking or heating in Hispanic and Asian communities:

- we required charcoal manufacturers to have a warning pictogram [hold up picture] on all their bags of charcoal; some manufacturers have also done brochures in Spanish to help spread the message about this deadly, undetectable gas--which is that burning charcoal in any enclosed space can kill you, even when some ventilation is provided.

IV. Tackling the fire problem--it takes teamwork

A. Various studies, including those by NFPA and a recent one by the Washington University School

of Medicine in St. Louis, show: communities with higher percentages of persons living below the poverty level have higher rates of residential fires and higher rates of deaths from those fires:

1. homes tend to be older, and thus more likely to have aging, inadequate electrical wiring;

2. often use supplemental heating devices, such as space heaters, which account for 5600 fires each year;

3. more likely to not spend the resources to have working smoke detectors;

4. more likely to have older upholstered furniture and mattresses which do not meet the flammability standards;

5. less likely to have taken other steps to minimize fire death and injury (practicing escape routes, having fire extinguishers, etc.).

B. Some cities, El Paso, Texas, for example, have broken the link between poverty and fires by devising community based solutions.

1. it is tempting for us at federal level to want to impose our solutions on a problem;

2. this is area where we need people such as yourselves--the community leaders and citizens--to participate: "lead the way" in devising answers that fit your communities' circumstances;

3. smoke detector give-aways and installation projects can reduce injuries and deaths from fires in your home towns. Often local businesses will help fund smoke detectors with long-life batteries. Earlier this year I participated in a fire-station-sponsored fire prevention program in Fairfax, Virginia. The centerpiece of program was a major door-to-door effort to get more smoke detectors into homes/apartments. Free smoke

detectors were donated by Radio Shack;

C. CPSC's primary focus is on reducing fires involving consumer products

1. firefighting community has provided us with great help in looking for product-related fires and alerting us to new hazardous products;

2. we continue to need your help in this area;

a. example: in process of enlisting help of fire departments to report details of fires started by children playing with cigarette lighters and with multi-purpose lighters

b. purpose: 1) to assess effectiveness of current child-resistant cigarette lighter standard; and 2) obtain additional data on fires where multi-purpose lighters are involved to assist in our pending rulemaking on those devices

c. we are still interested in

enrolling departments in medium or large-size jurisdictions for participation: if your department is interested in participating, please contact Linda Smith at CPSC headquarters in Bethesda Maryland;

d. regardless of your formal participation in this project, please call Linda if you learn of a fire started by a child under the age of five with a multi-purpose lighter and she will follow up;

e. we always welcome data and information about product-related fires from fire departments;

f. we also use fire data to develop our annual residential fire loss estimates, which might be useful to your departments in obtaining grants or devising fire safety education programs; brought a few copies with me;

3. the members of your organization can

also help by making sure the Hispanic community is aware of CPSC, that we are there to assist them if they believe a product presents a risk of injury or death (whether fire related or not); Hotline is available 24 hours a day to provide information and for filing complaints.

D. I am aware of the many roles firefighters are called upon to play in addition to their primary job:

1. educators on fire safety;
2. role models for youth;
3. community spokespeople;
4. specialists in fire prevention;
5. and, most recently, first responders for CO alarms.

E. U.S. has made great progress in reducing the number of fires, fire injuries and fire fatalities, but still have much to do:

1. between 1980 and 1994, estimated residential structure fires declined by 40% and deaths associated with those fires decreased by 36%;

2. much of the decrease happened before 1990 (true of fire fatalities and injuries too); numbers have been fairly flat since 1990; Fire death rate is still higher than many other industrialized nations;

3. only way to see further significant reductions in the fire area is to bring all the many interested groups together: firefighters, community leaders, government officials at all levels, private organizations such as NFPA, Safe Kids, the North American Coalition for Fire & Life Safety Education, AARP, etc.

--working together and not in competition--
to target and reduce the number of fires in high risk areas

4. I like to congratulate you on your efforts to bring the NFPA's program (Mis Primeros pasos en prevencion contra incendios") to Hispanic school children; wonderful way to get young children involved in home fire safety.

F. I am particularly pleased to be here at time when the historic summit between your organization and the International Association of Black Professional Fire Fighters, the Women in the Fire Service and the International Association of Fire Chiefs is being held.

---I hope this is a major step in achieving the cooperation that needed at all levels if we are to make progress in better serving our communities by continuing to reduce fire deaths and injuries